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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 KUWAIT 002133

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SUBJECT: DART ASSESSMENT OF SAMAWAH

SUMMARY

1. DART Field Team West visited Samawah, the capital of Al Muthanna governorate on 15 May. Overall, vital services in the city appear to be operating at pre-war levels. Electricity and water remain sporadic. Hospitals and public health centers are operating, schools are open, stores and markets are busy, and local government has been re-established. The DART held separate meetings with the city's deputy mayor, representatives for the French NGO, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), and Coalition forces. End Summary.

MEETING WITH SAMAWAH DEPUTY MAYOR

2. The DART met with the newly selected Deputy Mayor of Samawa, a recently returned Iraqi exile who was selected by the city council approximately three weeks ago. The council meets twice a week, and the Deputy Mayor meets three times a week with Coalition personnel.

3. The Deputy Mayor informed the DART that electricity, which comes from An Nasiriyah, is sporadic. Sometimes it runs all day; on other days it only runs between three and four hours per day. (Note: This was confirmed in subsequent interviews with ACTED, local population, and Coalition forces. End Note.) This, in turn, means that the water system only functions sporadically. According to the Deputy Mayor, this problem existed before the war, but now people's expectations are higher. He stated, "Now the people ask for more because they have the freedom to talk."

4. The city has one general hospital and one maternal/pediatric hospital. There are 28 public health centers in Al Muthana governorate. All are operating and have basic medical supplies. (Note: The DART did not visit local health facilities due to time constraints, but relied instead on information from the Deputy Mayor, ACTED, and Coalition forces. End Note.)

5. Government services and systems are beginning to resume function, and the Deputy Mayor reported that salaries have been paid. The USD 20 emergency stipend was also being paid, and the DART witnessed the payment process at city hall. Garbage collection is also taking place, although at reduced capacity due to the looting of some of the garbage trucks. The criminal justice system is functioning. The city council has selected three new judges who are processing old cases. The local police force is also functioning. Schools re-opened at the beginning of May. The former regime had used 17 of the schools as ammunition dumps, but Coalition forces have cleared all of these schools of unexploded ordnance (UXO). The local university is scheduled to re-open on 17 May.

6. A local sheik has funded the establishment of a local television station and a local weekly newspaper. A crew from the local television station was present during the entire interview, and the event was filmed for the evening news. The newspaper also showed up later to photograph the DART.

7. The public distribution system (PDS) is in place and distributions are scheduled to resume at the beginning of June. There is a shortage of LPG cooking gas, but kerosene is available and "affordable", according to the Deputy Mayor and others present in the meeting. The Deputy Mayor listed as priorities improvements to the chronic problems of electricity, water, and sewage.

ACTED'S RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS

18. ACTED representatives based in Samawah offered the DART their opinions of the city and governorate's main problems in water, sanitation, health, and agriculture, and potential emergency solutions for water and sanitation. Overall, most problems in Samawah are chronic rather than symptoms caused by the war, according to ACTED. However, residents were apt to complain because their expectations of Coalition-led improvements were great.

19. The water from the Euphrates and most of the governorate's water tables and canals is too salty for human consumption. Samawah's drinking water flows through a faulty pipeline to its water-treatment center (WTC) from a source located 20 kilometers to the north where there is a pumping station and a WTC. There are two compact units midway in the pipeline that sends water to 10 to 15 villages. Most villages in Al Muthanna are not on the pipeline and receive tankered water on an irregular basis.

110. ACTED proposes four immediate interventions: 1) repair the leakage on the main pipeline that reduces capacity by 20 percent; 2) improve the capacity of the WTCs in Ar Rumaythah and Samawa, and the pumping station in Ar Rumaythah; 3) rehabilitate the two compact units; and 4) develop a comprehensive and regular rural water-distribution system using tankers. Some looted tankers would need to be replaced and others added to reach full coverage.

111. With no sewage-sewer system, raw waste flows directly into the Euphrates River via the storm-sewer system. Many neighborhoods rely on septic-system networks for every three to four thousand people; however, some systems are blocked and others not functioning. ACTED proposes the following sanitation interventions for Samawah: 1) clean the storm-sewer system's pumping station and tanks that are filled with sedimentation; 2) make emergency repairs and remove overflowing waste from a particular neighborhood's septic system that is faulty and is causing a health hazard; 3) temporarily rent trucks to replace looted garbage trucks to carry out solid-waste disposal; and 4) implement a rural sanitation education program, promoting improved latrines and sanitary methods.

112. ACTED found Samawah's two hospitals to be relatively modern, "impressive," and with good doctors, although they lacked some basic medicines, oxygen, and blood-testing capacity. The hospitals also needed general maintenance. The biggest problem for children was diarrhea, and for adults, chest infections. There were unsubstantiated fears of typhoid fever, malaria, and cholera. The one primary health center ACTED visited lacked all basic drugs. UXOs were a serious rural, but not urban, problem.

113. Al Muthanna is slowly losing arable land as salty water and poor irrigation erodes soil fertility, causing an increasing rural livelihood problem. This month, Al Muthanna wheat farmers face calamity as the stalled Oil for Food Program (OFF) prevents the purchase of local crops. Farmers harvested their wheat earlier this month and are storing it in their silos, unable to sell it to dealers who would normally sell it to the government. Al Muthanna wheat, nearly the sole crop in Al Muthanna, yields a paltry 150 kilograms per "doneem," or quarter hectare. It comes in two varieties: 1) "Mastaback" wheat for human consumption; and 2) "scheen" wheat for animals. Before the war, farmers had no incentive to diversify or seek other livelihood initiatives because they became dependent on the OFF.

MEETING WITH COALITION FORCES

114. The DART spoke briefly with Coalition forces, who reported that a mass grave, containing between 100 and 600 bodies, was found ten days ago on the outskirts of Samawah. When uncovered, many, if not all seemed to have been executed, including women and children. Some had bullet holes in their heads and others were bound and blindfolded. The site is being secured 24 hours a day, seven days a week by Coalition forces. Asking if there is tension amongst the community because of Coalition presence at the site, the DART was told that the locals have usually been appreciative of any military presence accorded to them.

115. Coalition forces are also working on the local justice system in Samawah. Three judges were appointed on 8 May by the attorneys union and are currently trying cases. Out of seventeen judges, sixteen were fired because of their close connection to the Ba'ath Party and history of corruption. Interestingly, because the laws significantly changed when Saddam Hussein took over leadership of Iraq (generally not

for the better), the Coalition appointment letter to the judges specifically includes language that states "You are charged to enforce the good and just laws of the Iraqi people."

JONES